



# The students with disabilities subgroup and adequate yearly progress in Mid-Atlantic Region schools



Institute of Education Sciences

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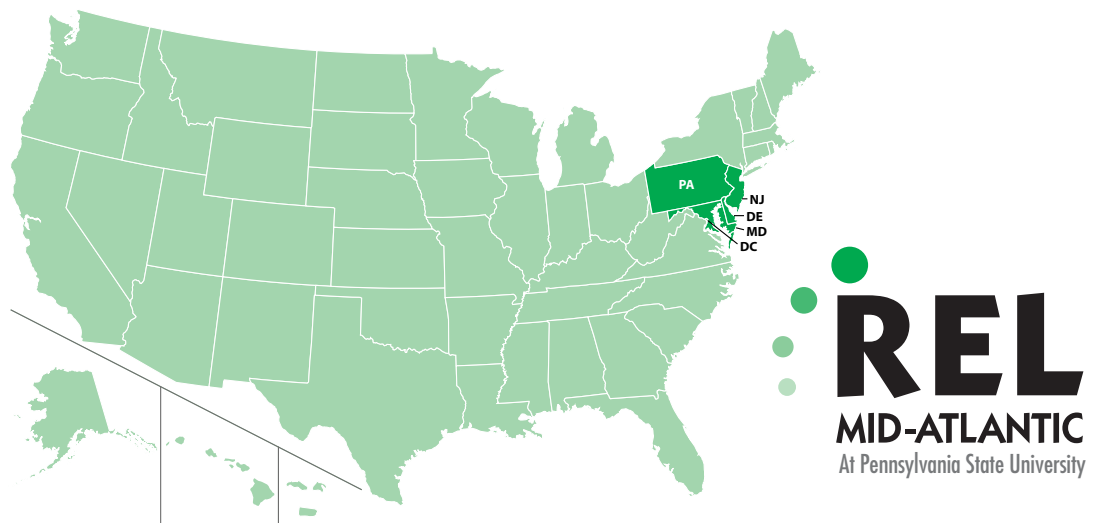
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**Prepared by**

**Karen E. Johnson  
The Pennsylvania State University**

**Kyle Peck  
REL Mid-Atlantic**

**John Wise  
REL Mid-Atlantic**



**Issues & Answers** is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

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## Summary

# The students with disabilities subgroup and adequate yearly progress in Mid-Atlantic Region schools

**The percentages of students with disabilities were similar for all five Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions, at about 14 percent of students, but the percentages of schools reporting for this subgroup varied from 15 percent for Pennsylvania to 96 percent for Maryland. In four states more schools missed their adequate yearly progress targets solely because of the performance of this subgroup than because of the performance of any other subgroup.**

The No Child Left Behind Act requires each state to set a series of annual targets to ensure that all students make adequate yearly progress in achieving proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013/14. Schools must monitor annual progress toward proficiency goals for each of several subgroups, including students with disabilities, as well as for the entire student population. Each state sets a minimum group size (N-size) to determine whether a subgroup is sufficiently large to produce a statistically reliable participation rate for calculating its adequate yearly progress. If the number of students in a subgroup is lower than the minimum N-size, adequate yearly progress is not reported.

This report focuses on the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup within the Mid-Atlantic Region. It describes for education leaders and policymakers how adequate yearly progress standards and targets are being set for this subgroup of students, provides data on its achievements, and offers evidence of

how this subgroup's performance influences adequate yearly progress determinations in schools in the region. Besides providing a more comprehensive picture of this subgroup's performance, identifying differences in the achievements of students with disabilities may help to determine where important educational progress is being made and where it remains to be made.

This report addresses four questions for the region:

- What percentage of students enrolled in each state have been identified as members of the students with disabilities subgroup?
- What percentage of schools in each state reported adequate yearly progress for the students with disabilities subgroup?
- What percentage of schools in each state missed their adequate yearly progress targets for the students with disabilities subgroup?
- What percentage of schools in each state that missed their adequate yearly progress targets missed them solely because of the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup?

The percentages of students with disabilities were similar for all five Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions: Maryland (12 percent), Delaware (13 percent), New Jersey (15 percent), Pennsylvania (14 percent), and the District of Columbia (17 percent). The percentage of schools reporting for this subgroup varied considerably, however, from 15 percent for Pennsylvania to

96 percent for Maryland. Maryland's much lower N-size (5) appears to account for its high reporting percentage. Delaware had the next highest reporting percentage, at 28 percent.

While students with disabilities represent a relatively low proportion of total student enrollment, in four states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), more schools missed their adequate yearly progress targets solely because of the performance of this subgroup than because of the performance of any other subgroup. The District of Columbia was the only exception. There, the students with disabilities subgroup ranked only slightly lower than two other subgroups in number of schools missing adequate yearly progress targets due solely to the performance of a particular subgroup.

New Jersey has the highest percentage of reporting schools that missed adequate yearly progress targets solely because of the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup (29 percent). Delaware has the second highest percentage of reporting schools that missed adequate yearly progress targets solely because of the performance of this subgroup (28 percent) and the highest percentage of all schools that missed the targets solely because of the performance of this subgroup (8 percent) even though its percentage of students with disabilities (12 percent) is similar to that of the other states. The District of Columbia, with the highest percentage of students with disabilities (17 percent) enrolled in its schools, has the second lowest percentage of reporting schools that missed the targets solely because of the performance of this subgroup (9 percent) and the lowest percentage of all schools that missed the targets solely because of the performance of this subgroup (2 percent).

These state patterns prompt questions about what factors enable fewer schools in the District of Columbia to miss adequate yearly progress targets solely because of the performance of the students with disabilities

subgroup, or why schools in Delaware are more than twice as likely to miss adequate yearly progress targets solely because of the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup. Explanations may include differences in statewide tests, minimum N-sizes, higher annual measurable objectives, or the criteria for identifying students with disabilities. Further research is needed on the criteria and processes for identifying students with disabilities to provide more accurate descriptions of the achievements of this subgroup. Additional research might also determine whether the exceptionally high poverty rate in the District of Columbia (at 66 percent, twice the rate in other jurisdictions in the region; Johnson, Peck, & Wise, 2007) confounds the ability of schools to meet adequate yearly progress targets, explaining the low percentage of students who miss solely for this reason.

The analysis in this report leads to three main recommendations:

1. Reconsider current policies, taking into account the characteristics of the student population when setting each school's annual improvement targets, to allow states to set more educationally appropriate annual measurable objectives for students with disabilities.
2. Understand "relative" school progress, investigating how the achievement of students in each subgroup compares with the achievement of students in the same subgroup in other, similar schools. To help school leaders understand their schools' relative progress, REL Mid-Atlantic is creating an "Understanding Student Progress in Schools Like Mine" online interactive tool.
3. Strive for progress with students with disabilities by bringing to bear the creative problem-solving skills of researchers, policymakers, and educators to find ways to make education more effective for students with disabilities.

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